

## Dead & Alive – Romans, Part 2

Romans has many times been called the most theological book in the New Testament. How in the world could this brilliant 7100-word theological thesis have been written by a former Jewish Pharisee who absolutely hated Christianity, passionately persecuted the early church, and even helped to kill the first Christian martyr?!

The answer is found in the words of Paul's oft-repeated testimony ...

**1 Corinthians 15:7-10** After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one **born out of due time**. For I am the **least of the apostles**, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the **grace** of God I am what I am: and his **grace** which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the **grace** of God which was with me.

Paul says that he was “born out of due time.” The Greek word is “ektromah” and it means “untimely birth, miscarriage, or BORN WOUNDED.” That’s why he felt like he was the “least of the apostles,” because he was born into God’s family with a huge DISADVANTAGE. But that didn’t stop the GRACE of God from working in his life!

In his former life, Paul was on the “WHO’S WHO” list. But since his conversion, the issue now is not WHO he is, but WHOSE he is! (And that, in the end, will be the only thing that makes YOUR life significant, and the only thing that gets you into Heaven.)

**Philippians 3:4-8** Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

And since Paul now sees clearly that his former “life” was really DEATH, he begins the book of Romans with a very dark picture of humanity, and a frightening picture of God’s WRATH against sin – **because if you don’t understand the wrath of God, the gospel will never move you.**

### CHAPTER ONE: WE ARE “DEAD IN CARNALITY.”

Religious people agree totally with Paul in chapter one, and that’s why chapter two comes as a bucket of cold water. It is a brilliant turnaround:

**Romans 2:3** And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

### CHAPTER TWO: WE ARE “DEAD IN HYPOCRISY.”

**A self-righteous person is rejecting God just as much as an unrighteous person!** Romans 1 & 2 set before us the same two people that Jesus does in his parable about the two sons (Luke 15:11-32). There is a younger brother who is dead in carnality, but there is also an elder brother who is dead in hypocrisy! **There are TWO prodigal sons!**

The self-righteous people in chapter 2 are in the same boat as the unrighteous people in chapter 1 – they think they are not experiencing God’s wrath because nothing bad is happening to them right NOW. But the problem is that, because they are not keeping God’s Law perfectly, BOTH kinds of people are storing up wrath for the Day of Judgment!

**Romans 2:4-6** Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; **not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?** But after thy hardness and impenitent heart **treasurest up unto thyself wrath** against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man **according to his deeds:**

Verse 6 says that we will be judged according to our “deeds.” **WORKS MATTER** – not as the BASIS for salvation, but as the EVIDENCE that we have real faith. The apples on an apple tree prove that it has life, but they don’t provide that life. Your good works PROVE that you have a relationship with God, but they don’t PROVIDE that relationship. The question is whether your good works are merely RELIGIOUS, or REAL.

**Romans 2:11-13** For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Jews and Gentiles alike will be judged based on their OBEDIENCE to the Law of God, and BOTH will be found guilty because BOTH have SINNED. There are “bad Jews” who disobey the law even though they know it, and “good Gentiles” who obey the Law even though they don’t know it (because they have a God-given conscience). But even the BEST efforts of ANY man fall FAR short of God’s perfect standard.

Paul's target in chapter two is the HYPOCRISY of people who think they are "good" in God's sight because they know His Law. But Paul says, "You know it, but don't do it. What good is that?!" Just like today, the HYPOCRISY of these believers is an embarrassment to the church. It's one thing for the world to criticize us because of our BELIEFS, but it's another thing when they can criticize us because of our BEHAVIOR!

**Romans 2:23-24** Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

The bottom line for both Gentiles AND Jews is this – there must be a work of God's Spirit in our lives! Otherwise, we either break the Law outwardly (like the sinful Gentiles) or inwardly (like the hypocritical Jews). Religion can't prevent our hearts from sinning; it only hides our sin. The question for EVERYONE is, "What is really happening in my HEART?"

**Romans 2:28-29** For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Paul is not "bashing" circumcision here – Paul WAS circumcised! Circumcision was the OT visual sign of the penalty for breaking God's covenant – if you didn't keep God's Law, you would be CUT OFF. The point here is not that Jewish circumcision is "pointless" – the point is that circumcision is actually "powerless" without something MORE.

That's why we need JESUS. He was "cut off from the land of the living" for US (Isaiah 53:8). He bore the penalty of being forsaken even though WE broke the Law (Mark 15:34). That's why Paul says in Colossians (2:11-12) that we can now experience the "circumcision of Christ" when we are baptized in His name. We need JESUS to take away our "cut-offness" (curse) on our behalf – we can't do it on our own!

This is not just RELIGION – it is RELATIONSHIP with the One who loved us so much. It is possible to trust in our "Christianity" rather than in CHRIST. But we never really grasp the full power of the gospel until we understand, like Paul, that WE are the worst sinner we know – and that if Jesus came to die for US, there is NO ONE that he would not die for!

**1 Timothy 1:15** This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

As he begins chapter 3, Paul anticipates and answers OBJECTIONS from those in the Roman church who are from a Jewish background ...

- (3:1) Are you saying there's no advantage to being a Jew?
- (3:2) *No. The Jews have a great advantage because they were given the Law of God.*
- (3:3) But the Jews didn't faithfully keep the covenant God gave them. Does that mean that God will no longer honor His promises?
- (3:4) *No. Despite the unfaithfulness of man, God is still faithful. In fact, our sin only reveals how committed God is to His covenant.*
- (3:5) If our sin actually helps to reveal God's righteousness, then isn't it wrong for God to punish us for our sin?
- (3:6) *No. That's ridiculous ("God forbid")! What kind of God would that be, to overlook all the sin and wrong in the world?!*
- (3:7) But if my sin is actually proving God's Word to be true, shouldn't I actually be sinning more, not less?
- (3:8) *No. Some people claim that is what I am preaching, but that's slanderous! Saying that we should sin so God can show mercy is an attitude that won't receive mercy, but judgment.*
- (3:9) Well, are the religious Jews better than the sinful Gentiles?
- (3:10) *No. I've already proved that no one is righteous before God.*

Next, Paul gives a long list of sin's effects on us. When he concludes that we are all "under sin" (3:9), he uses a legal term – we are literally "citizens of sin." This doesn't mean that all people are equally sinful in their DEEDS; it means that our LEGAL CONDITION before God is the same. We are ALL lost, and there are no "degrees of lostness."

**God's Law is not a checklist we keep; it is a benchmark we fail.**

Its purpose is to shut every mouth before God (3:19), to show that every man is equally guilty of sin (3:19), to let us know how God defines sin (3:20), and to conclude that even keeping the Law externally won't fix us internally (3:20)! We get a failing grade before we even write the test!

**Romans 3:19-20** Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that **every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.** Therefore **by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified** in his sight: for **by the law is the knowledge of sin.**

## CHAPTER ONE: WE ARE “DEAD IN CARNALITY.”

## CHAPTER TWO: WE ARE “DEAD IN HYPOCRISY.”

## CHAPTER THREE: WE ARE “DEAD UNDER THE LAW.”

And that’s the way it has always been (OT) ... **BUT NOW** (3:21) ... !!!

**Romans 3:21-24** But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the **righteousness** of God which is by **faith** of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is **no difference**: For **all have sinned**, and **come short** of the glory of God; Being **justified** freely by his **grace** through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus:

BUT NOW ... Paul turns from the horrible darkness of our sin to the glorious light of the gospel ... and the GOSPEL says that we who could never MERIT right standing with God can actually be GIVEN right standing with God!

**Righteousness is like a RESUME.** If you want a position, you send it in. It has all the experiences and qualifications that you hope will make you worthy of the position. It says, “Look at this! Accept me!” And every religion teaches some form of “righteousness” – if the performance record of your life is good enough, then (hopefully!) God will accept you.

BUT NOW ... the Gospel offers something completely different! Outside of the Gospel, we must offer OUR best and say, “Please accept me.” But the Gospel gives us GOD’S best and says, “You are accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). I get the “position” of righteousness because of the perfect resume of Jesus Christ! It doesn’t happen because I KEPT the Law perfectly, but because Jesus FULFILLED the Law perfectly.

There is NO DIFFERENCE between Law keepers and Law breakers (3:22) ... ALL have sinned (3:23) ... ALL have come short of God’s perfect standard (3:23) ... but ALL can be declared righteous (“justified” – 3:24) ... and this happens “BY grace, THROUGH redemption” (3:24).

The word GRACE is used 155 times in the New Testament – over 100 times in the writings of Paul, and 24 times in the book of Romans alone. You can’t comprehend this book if you don’t comprehend grace. And GRACE IS A GIFT – it is not God’s RESPONSE to all our efforts, it is His INITIATIVE before we do anything good. In fact, grace is really God ENABLING us to do good in the first place. **NO GRACE, NO GOOD.** That’s why grace is always received through faith, not earned by works. The good works come AFTER salvation, and they are also BY grace.

How does REDEMPTION work? In Bible times, it was all too easy to get into debt, and then have to sell yourself into slavery in a futile attempt to pay back that debt. That’s why the Law made provision for a REDEEMER, someone who would buy you out of that debt so you could live free again (Leviticus 25:25). And that’s what JESUS did for us!

**Only redemption explains how a just God can justify justifying me!** Remember God’s WRATH against sinfulness in chapter one, and against self-righteousness in chapter two? Well, the word PROPITIATION (3:25) means “the turning away of God’s wrath” – and it happened with Jesus took our punishment through the shedding of His blood at Calvary.

**The cross is the place where the JUDGE takes the JUDGMENT.** God couldn’t be just and set His justice aside; instead, He turned His wrath against Himself! The cross was not a “compromise” between God’s wrath and God’s love – the cross demonstrated BOTH perfectly.

**Romans 3:25-26** Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Paul concludes by saying that “boasting is excluded” (3:27). Boasting and believing are opposites – you can’t do both! You are either relying on God’s righteousness or your righteousness – you can’t do both!

**Romans 3:27-31** Where is **boasting** then? It is **excluded**. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. **Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.**

Since we are saved BY FAITH, does that mean that God’s Law has been set aside or its requirements changed? Paul says, “God forbid!” (3:31) The Law of God is still there, and must still be kept – it must be obeyed for anyone to stand in His presence. **The gospel does not declare that the Law does not matter, but that it matters very much!** The Law matters enough to God for it to bring DEATH – but thank God, because of Calvary, it no longer means OUR death! JESUS paid it all!

A real Christian, who knows they have been saved “without the deeds of the law” (3:28), actually loves God’s commandments MORE, not LESS. We keep them because we ARE saved, out of gratitude for God’s grace. And we keep them because we are ENABLED to do so by God’s grace.